

**August 2003**

## **NGA Learning Network on Information Systems**

*Background: Goals and Strategies for a Demand-Driven Workforce System*

1. Economic development and job growth depend upon on a well-trained workforce. To keep and attract businesses, employers need well-educated, highly motivated workers with access to training and high-quality educational institutions. A statewide, public and private sector strategy is needed to accomplish these goals.
2. Workers' prosperity and opportunity for upward mobility hinge upon the acquisition of the knowledge and skills that employers demand. This is the difference between moving up the ladder of opportunity and remaining stuck in low-paying, entry-level jobs.
3. The equation therefore is simple: for people to get jobs, those jobs have to exist. For employers to fill those jobs, people need to be trained and prepared with the appropriate skills. That is a basic rationale behind the value of determining the short term and future skill needs of important industries in a state's economy.
4. By undertaking an in-depth investigation of the skills needs of a state's core industries, workforce development policy makers will be able to provide consistent, clear information about the changing occupational landscape to employers, educators, training providers, jobseekers and students. Just as a successful business conducts consistent market analysis, students and educators need to understand emerging markets for jobs and skills.
5. Undertaking an analysis of skills demand can be accomplished in a variety of ways. However, there are several core elements of an effective approach:  
  
First, listen carefully and frequently to employers by collecting information on skill needs directly through advisory boards, focus groups, and one on one interviews. These extensive, in-depth "listening" sessions must take frequently and consistently throughout a state's employer communities.

Second, evaluate information carefully before reaching conclusions. A common practice of all well-crafted research process is sifting through anecdotes and observations before asserting that a broad pattern has been discovered. It is important to compare and analyze information gathered from employers with economic trend data from the best sources.

Finally, collect and disseminate findings for key “end users.” Research on skill needs is intended to help shape the resource decisions and practices of the workforce agencies and educational institutions. Ultimately, better knowledge about the demand for particular skills should produce more efficient and effective students and workers for jobs. Research on the demand for skills must be translated into curricula and programs that teach students the skills they will truly need to succeed in the workplace.

Ultimately, high quality and easy to understand information about jobs and skills must be made available to jobseekers and students, job counselors, teachers, and parents. The Internet makes this possible and affordable. Such information will help people make informed decisions about careers and the education and training required.